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REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE UNITED NATIONS IRAQ-KUWAIT OBSERVATION MISSION

(24 September 1997-23 March 1998)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report provides an account of developments and activities in respect of the mandate entrusted to the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM), in accordance with Security Council resolutions 687 (1991) of 8 April 1991, 689 (1991) of 14 June 1991 and 806 (1993) of 5 February 1993. It covers the period from 24 September 1997 to 23 March 1998.

II. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE

2. The situation in the demilitarized zone was generally calm, despite the tension created in the Gulf region by the crisis over weapons inspections in Iraq. UNIKOM carried out its normal operations without interruption during the period under review.

3. Two serious incidents occurred during the period. The first, on 20 November 1997, involved firing at a UNIKOM position (N-4) located on the Iraqi side of the demilitarized zone. A United Nations military observer was seriously wounded and United Nations property, including vehicles and accommodation units, were damaged during the incident. An investigation carried out by UNIKOM could not establish the motive for the shooting nor the identity of the attackers. The Force Commander lodged a strong complaint with the Iraqi authorities, who instituted their own investigations without success. The second incident involved the hijacking at gunpoint of a UNIKOM patrol vehicle, also on the Iraqi side of the demilitarized zone, on 18 February 1998. In this case too, a strong complaint was lodged with the Iraqi authorities. The vehicle was found stripped of equipment on 10 March 1998 on the edge of the Iraqi side of the demilitarized. The identity of the hijackers remains unknown. There were a few minor incidents of Iraqi children throwing stones at UNIKOM patrols in the demilitarized zone. No injuries were sustained, and damage to property was insignificant.

4. There were 12 ground violations and one in the Khawr Abd Allah waterway. Five involved firing by unknown persons, three occurred on the Kuwaiti side and two on the Iraqi side. UNIKOM patrols found unauthorized weapons on three occasions at Kuwaiti police posts inside the demilitarized zone and once at an Iraqi police post. One violation involved a Kuwaiti military truck inside the demilitarized zone. Another violation occurred in the Khawr Abd Allah waterway on 20 January 1998, when a Kuwaiti landing craft unit and a Kuwaiti coast guard patrol boat, each mounted with a machine gun, were observed in the waterway near the vicinity of Warbah Island on the Kuwaiti side of the demilitarized zone. Iraq complained of firing from these vessels at an unarmed Iraqi patrol boat that was on the Iraqi side of the demilitarized zone. UNIKOM investigated, but could not confirm, the firing. Two unauthorized border crossings were recorded. One involved an Iraqi civilian who crossed the border into Kuwait seeking asylum. He was handed over to the Kuwaiti police, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were informed. The second occurred when three Iraqis went into Kuwait to rescue a camel that had fallen into a trench.

5. Air violations increased significantly; 179 were recorded (up from 49), most of them in February 1998. Although most of the aircraft flew too high to be identified, on 29 occasions the aircraft were identified as F-14, F-15, F-16, F-18, C-130, KC-135, UH "Apache" helicopters, Black Hawk helicopters and E2C military planes. Such aircraft are used by the coalition forces in the region, but the nationalities could not be confirmed.

6. A total of 12 oral complaints were recorded during the period under review, down from 35 recorded in the previous period (see S/1997/740). Six complaints were lodged by Iraq and six by Kuwait.

7. Activities in the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr continued to increase. A total of 125 vessels, of which 122 came under the "oil-for-food" programme, docked at the port. Three other vessels brought relief assistance.

8. Oil drilling activities continued on both sides of the border, mainly on the Kuwaiti side at the Al-Ratqa oilfield. On the Iraqi side, only two new sites have been drilled, also within the Al-Ratqa oilfield.

9. Work is almost complete on the electric fence that Kuwait is erecting along the border. The fence has almost reached the southern limit of the demilitarized zone. More work remains to be done, particularly on the remote-controlled gates.

10. In my previous report, I indicated that work had begun on a project aimed at improving the monitoring of the Khawr Abd Allah waterway. The upgrading of the radar and night vision equipment was completed at the end of January 1998, and the construction of the additional observation post is in progress.

11. UNIKOM disposed of unexploded mines and bomblets in the demilitarized zone. A total of 1,882 unexploded devices, including a 500 kilogram aircraft bomb, 2 missiles, 181 bomblets, 130 rockets, 637 artillery and mortar rounds and 931 other devices, were destroyed. Unexploded mines and bomblets inside the

demilitarized zone, mostly on the Iraqi side, continued to cause casualties, some of them fatal, to civilians living and working in the area.

12. UNIKOM provided security and logistic support for meetings of the ICRC Technical Subcommittee on Military and Civilian Missing Prisoners of War and Mortal Remains on 10 November and 21 December 1997 and 3 February and 18 March 1998. They were conducted in the demilitarized zone, alternately at UNIKOM headquarters in Umm Qasr, Iraq, and at the UNIKOM support base at Camp Khor, Kuwait. ICRC representatives from Iraq and Kuwait, delegations from Iraq and Kuwait, and observers from France, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America attended the meetings.

13. UNIKOM continued to maintain close and regular liaison with the authorities of both Iraq and Kuwait at various levels, including through its liaison offices in Baghdad and Kuwait City. Both parties cooperated with the Mission in the conduct of its operations.

III. ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

14. As at March 1998, the overall strength of UNIKOM was 1,292, comprising:

(a) A total of 193 military observers, from Argentina (3), Austria (6), Bangladesh (5), Canada (4), China (11), Denmark (5), Fiji (5), Finland (5), France (11), Ghana (5), Greece (5), Hungary (6), India (5), Indonesia (5), Ireland (6), Italy (5), Kenya (6), Malaysia (5), Nigeria (6), Pakistan (6), Poland (5), Romania (5), the Russian Federation (11), Senegal (5), Singapore (5), Sweden (6), Thailand (5), Turkey (7), the United Kingdom (11), the United States of America (11), Uruguay (5) and Venezuela (2);

(b) An infantry battalion of 767 from Bangladesh;

(c) An engineering unit of 42 from Argentina;

(d) A logistics unit of 34 from Austria;

(e) A helicopter unit of 35 from Bangladesh;

(f) A medical unit of 14 from Germany;

(g) A total of 207 civilian staff, of whom 60 were recruited internationally.

15. On 1 December 1997, Major-General Esa Tarvainen (Finland) succeeded Major-General Gian Giuseppe Santillo (Italy) as Force Commander. I wish to pay tribute to General Santillo for the professional and effective manner in which he provided leadership to UNIKOM.

IV. FINANCIAL ASPECTS

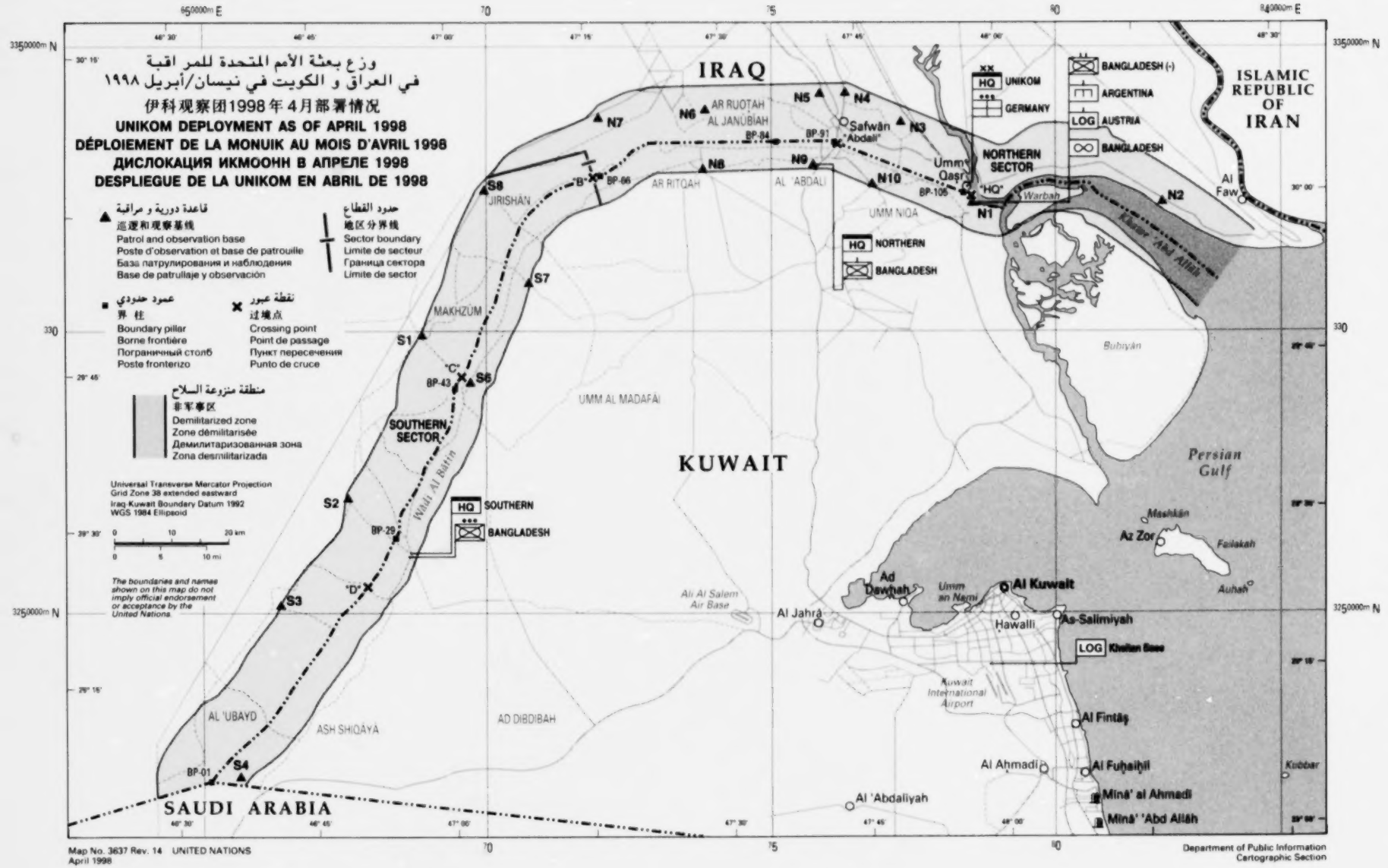
16. The General Assembly, in its resolution 51/234 of 13 June 1997, appropriated $51,487,500 gross for the maintenance of UNIKOM for the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998, subject to review by the Security Council with regard to the question of termination or continuation of the Mission. Two thirds of the cost of the Mission, equivalent to some $33.1 million, is to be funded through voluntary contributions from the Government of Kuwait. Assessments on Member States have been made for the period ending 30 April 1998, and the Government of Kuwait has paid its voluntary contributions for the period ending 30 April 1998.

17. As at 20 March 1998, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIKOM since the inception of the Mission through 30 April 1998 amounted to $12.4 million, representing some 5 per cent of the assessment for the Mission. The unpaid assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations amounted to $1.7 billion.

V. OBSERVATIONS

18. UNIKOM continued to contribute to the maintenance of calm and stability in the demilitarized zone. The situation along the border was generally quiet, and UNIKOM received the cooperation of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti authorities in discharging its duties. During the month of December, I used the opportunity of a visit to Kuwait to travel to the demilitarized zone in order to review the situation on the ground. I was satisfied with the manner in which UNIKOM was carrying out its work and contributing to ensuring stability in this sensitive area. I recommend that the Mission be maintained.

19. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to Major-General Tarvainen and the men and women, military and civilian, under his command for the manner in which they have discharged their responsibilities. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, on their countries and on the United Nations.



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